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Inquiring Words

One God – Many Names

One Sunday the Archangel called to the Lord
"This is Gabriel here can I please have a word?"
And the voice of a seraph came from the sky.
"You are through to the Heavenly call-centre on high.
Press One for Miracles and Manifestations,
Press Two for Psalms and Incantations;
Press Three for advice on Sex and Schisms,
And Four for Plagues and Exorcisms.
If it's none of these then hold the line
And you will be put through in time.

"But we must apologise to you
Your call is in a lengthy queue.
Due to the recent huge increase
In phone calls from repentant priests.
Meantime there's music for distraction
From our newest angel, Michael Jackson."
Gabriel waited for hours on hold,
And at last got connected to the Lord.

Then Gabriel spake "Great Allah, the Giver,
It's thine Archangel here with prayers to deliver"
But the Lord waxing wroth said "Gabriel pray,
Hast thou forgotten its Sunday today?
On Sundays remember I'm God the Father.
It's on Fridays that they call me Allah.
And on Saturdays, the day for Jews,
Yahweh is the name to use.

"And the ancient Romans every Xmas
Seemed to think my name was Mithras.
When that apple fell from Newton's tree,
I was called The Force of Gravity.
Then after Darwin's contribution,
The Atheists called me Evolution.
Now Stephen Hawking is writing articles
Which call me Fundamental Particles.

"These humans all have different names
For Life's Mystery which they can't explain.
But now I've cleared this up with you,
What are the prayers you're phoning through?
I hope it's something else instead
Of their usual prayer for Daily Bread."
"Today they pray for peace!"
Said God "Will wonders never cease?"

"The Earth had peace a million eons,
Ere I created human beings.
Now they bomb each other in my name,
They wage their wars, they kill and maim.
Despoil my land, pollute my sea,
Then pray for Peace-on-Earth from me!
I love them but I sometimes wonder
If creating Adam was a blunder".

— Leslie Davidson

Wisdom whispers when we listen

By Margaret Kirk

Solomon has a dream and in that dream God asks Solomon what gift he should bestow upon him. And Solomon doesn't ask for riches or eternal life or the power to vanquish his enemies. Instead he asks for an 'understanding heart' or in the *New Revised Standard Version* [of the Bible] 'an understanding mind'. God is very impressed and replies:

Because you have asked this and not asked for yourself long life or riches ... but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right ... I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.

We associate Solomon with wisdom, just as we associate Samson with strength, King David with songs and psalms and Moses with the rule of law. Solomon is a by-word for wisdom:

God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore.

I'm not concerned to examine how reasonable a claim this is. There seems to be a lot of evidence in the Jewish scriptures to show that he was both wise and foolish. Like many political figures who wield power that is uncontested, he seems to have fallen into the trap of displaying his wealth and his power in an ostentatious way. He's described as having a lavish life style; the immense wealth he seeks seems to argue a lack of wisdom and yet the beautiful passage from 1 Kings chapter 4 verses 29 - 34 provides a picture of an exceptional human being.

AN UNDERSTANDING MIND

It's the dream and Solomon's request for an understanding mind that I'd like to concentrate on. In that dream, he is overwhelmed by the reality of his new responsibility – the task of being king over Israel. He says:

O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child. I do not know how to go out or to come in ... Give your servant, therefore, an understanding mind.

Whatever corruption and self-aggrandisement comes later, at this time the dream suggests something especially intelligent and sensitive about Solomon. It doesn't indicate that he wants power or wealth; it doesn't suggest that kingship has gone to his head. Rather, he is aware of his shortcomings, his inexperience and simply wishes to be a good ruler who can discern between good and evil.

A HEARING MIND

The Hebrew words for 'an understanding heart' are *lev shomea* and the more accurate translation of *lev shomea* is 'a hearing mind'. When God grants the request he refers to it as a request for discernment to hear justice. A hearing mind ... a listening mind ... what a difference a shift in meaning from one word to another makes: Solomon asks for a hearing mind.

So what is this listening, hearing mind? I think not just a mind that weighs up evidence in a cold, authoritative manner, according to some legal rules and statutes but a mind that actively engages with the reality of human distress and wants to find the right human way of delivering justice.

The Jewish scriptures reveal lots of conventional expectations about kingship – mostly in terms of power over enemies, the accumulation of wealth and long life. And, interestingly, so does our own national anthem:

God save our gracious Queen!



'Solomon judges the case of the two harlots' by Aquatint after L van Leyden. Public domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Long live our noble Queen!

God save the Queen!

Send her victorious,

Happy and glorious,

Long to reign over us,

God save the Queen.

But this is something different. Solomon was a king with absolute power, unlike our own monarch. He is not asking God to secure and consolidate that power, but for a mind that is responsive to human dilemmas – a listening, understanding mind that will help him to rule judiciously. He is asking to be able to dispense justice with discernment.

TWO WOMEN

It is no coincidence that the most famous judicial story about Solomon's wisdom is described in the Old Testament immediately after his request for *lev shomea* – a hearing mind. Two prostitutes come to him claiming that they are both the mother of a child. There are no witnesses. Each woman's story is as plausible as the other's. Solomon has to decide which of the women is lying and he does so by calling for a sword and suggesting that the child be divided in two. Whereupon, the real mother, in compassion for the child reveals herself by imploring Solomon not to do this and telling him to give the child to the other woman.

I must admit I often used to wonder how he would have sorted this out if both women had implored him not to and the barbarity of such a solution makes it difficult for us to regard it as wisdom. But the key point here is his engagement with the importance of finding a way that will reveal the maternal

(Continued on next page)

Resolutions do bring about change

By Derek McAuley

Amongst the key features of the General Assembly Annual Meetings are the Resolutions. Sometimes controversial, sometimes they endorse 'motherhood and apple pie' i.e. with which most Unitarians would not disagree. The purpose of Resolutions has been discussed in recent editions of *The Inquirer* (27 September, 25 October and 8 November 2014) and there will be an opportunity at this year's Meetings to explore the issue further with an Executive Committee-sponsored workshop.

I know that there is interest in finding out what happened with last year's Resolutions. We were approached by the Hungarian Unitarian Church to offer our support for their campaign against mining operations in the Roşia Montana area of Transylvania, Romania and this was overwhelmingly approved as an act of solidarity with our co-religionists. After the Annual Meetings I consulted with the Office of the Bishop of the Hungarian Unitarian Church and a copy was sent to them to be used as they saw fit. Their response was:

"Thank you for sharing this with us. We appreciate very much the support of our fellow Unitarians. At present we are waiting for the final vote in the Parliament. Until then there is nothing to be done. I will let you know how the situation evolves."

A letter highlighting our concerns was sent to the Romanian Ambassador to the UK who, after some chasing, replied indicating it has been passed to the authorities in Romania, however, no response has been received and I doubt we will get one.

The exclusion of secular and spiritual non-theist speakers from 'Thought for the Day' on the Today Programme was

raised with the Director-General of the BBC. A reply to my letter was received from Christine Morgan, Head of Radio, BBC Religion and Ethics. She explained her view of the background to the guest editorship of Sir Tim Berners-Lee. She pointed out that there were other places where the views of secular and non-theist speakers were heard and that the brief of



Derek McAuley

'Thought for the Day' was to offer a distinctive perspective on topical issues from the position of faith. Of course, Unitarians have a much wider view of what 'faith' constitutes as was put forward by the proposers. This is an issue that will not go away and to have a clear stance will enable us to comment and work with other partners who share our concerns.

An emergency Resolution was approved on the restrictions on access to books in prisons. A letter highlighting our concerns was sent to Chris Grayling, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State. A reply was received from Departmental officials essentially rejecting the points made. I believe the Prison Service's policy has since been challenged in court and the prisoner won. One by-product was that I was able to raise this issue with an adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister at an event in the Houses of Parliament who admitted that the issue should

(Continued on page 9)

Listen and hear the voice of God

(Continued from previous page)

compassion of the real mother – his engagement with the reality of human distress.

THE WISDOM TO HEAR DEEPLY

And there is something else too. Solomon has asked for the wisdom to hear deeply – not just in his discernment of the words of others and not just a listening that is revealed by human behaviour but a listening to the promptings of God; a listening to something from within that this gift of engagement with others has opened up within himself.

Wisdom is revealed as God's voice – a divine presence that shapes our awareness, that sharpens our judgement when we actively engage with the conflicts that afflict human life.

For Solomon and for Judaism, it is about the wisdom of God humanly embodied in order to dispense justice.

After the story of the two prostitutes, we are told that people were awed by the king for they saw the wisdom of God within him to act justly.

Most of us in Unitarian places of worship, don't talk about hearing the voice of God. Many of us would feel ill-at-ease making that claim, but we do often feel we have received some kind of clear direction.

Often at difficult times when we have wrestled with ways of dealing with a big problem, some kind of clarity emerges. We don't always understand how. Certainly trying to weigh pros

and cons hasn't worked. Sometimes we just find ourselves sitting quietly in an unresolved state, exhausted with the struggle to make sense of an intractable problem and then in some moment of surrender, perhaps we've quietly said 'over to you God' or perhaps we've totally exhausted all the possible solutions that our overloaded mind has emptied itself of its clutter and then we have a moment of enlightenment.

Some whispers of wisdom from somewhere have opened up, have broken through – a shaft of light has revealed a pathway.

There have been times in my life when accepting that my own human capacity to make sense of something is so flawed, so shot through with wrong assumptions, so misdirected, that surrendering to my own disarray and confusion, is the only remedy. Maybe it is a kind of losing of ego – the need to be in control. Whatever it is, I need to reach that stage before I can hear the whispers of wisdom.

LISTENING TO OURSELVES IS SACRED ART

When Maya Angelou, the black American writer, died last year, one of her last blog postings was this advice: 'Listen to yourself and in that quietude you might hear the voice of God.'

Listening to ourselves and others is a sacred art. Our world is crying out for people who listen with the mind and the heart and who know that some of that listening ability at its deepest and its most creative is a God-given gift.

The Rev Margaret Kirk is a retired Unitarian minister.

Too few candidates, no election needed

There was no election for the Unitarian General Assembly's Executive Committee (EC) because only two candidates came forward for four seats. Here is an interview with both new members, starting with Marion Baker:

Name: Marion Baker

Age: 68

Unitarian church/fellowship membership: Upper Chapel, Sheffield

How long have you been a Unitarian? 52 years

Why did you decide to run as a member of the Executive Committee (EC)? Being GA President 2014/2015 has been a privilege and an opportunity to learn more about what is important to Unitarians locally. My recent experience may be helpful in deciding future priorities for our denomination.

What is your most relevant previous experience and what particular strengths/skills do you bring? Chairperson of the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre since 2009 and a varied Civil Service management career has equipped me with a wide-ranging practical and analytical ability. Specifically, I am a good listener, a clear guide and mentor and able to sort out the wheat from the chaff.

How would you counter negative perceptions within the movement of EC? Be aware that what pleases some in our community may be anathema to others.

The people you criticise are unpaid volunteers. Ask yourself are you prepared to commit yourself to working for our movement, knowing that people may find fault with what you do? Always give the benefit of the doubt.

What ideas do you have for ensuring the financial health of the movement in the long term? Financial health is the result of careful and sustained financial

stewardship. Innovative fundraising may help because people always want improvement.

Wise spending on providing ministry, telling people who we are and keeping our buildings in excellent condition will, with purposeful persuasion, provide the cash.

Telling people what can be done if they increase their donation is more productive than lambasting them for their perceived parsimony.

What are your thoughts on more open communication between the EC and the larger movement? Our elected EC is empowered to make decisions for the Unitarian denomination. Those decisions should be communicated promptly using all available media whether it is regular periodicals, uninews, facebook, blogs... May be it is opportune to discuss how real time reporting of EC meetings might be possible?

UKUnitarianTV is a wonderful communication platform. Staffed by committed volunteers, it's ripe for use by Unitarians everywhere.

Describe yourself in one word: Daredevil



Gwynn Pritchard: a communicator to represent Wales

Name: Gwynn Pritchard

Age: 69

Unitarian church/fellowship membership: Undodiaid Caerdydd/Cardiff Unitarians

How long have you been a Unitarian?

Raised in the denomination as the son of a Unitarian minister and his wife, Islwyn and Megan Pritchard, I have been a member of the Cardiff congregation since 2010.

Why did you decide to run as a member of the Executive Committee (EC)?

Welsh Unitarianism has a distinctive history and voice (in both its languages) and it can only benefit the denomination across the UK to have a Welsh presence engaged in its governance, adding to the movement's diversity at its highest levels.

What is your most relevant previous experience and what particular strengths/skills do you bring? Extensive management experience in broadcasting and as an officer or board member of a wide range of voluntary organisations and charitable trusts at an international, UK, Welsh and local level. I hope I bring patience, diplomacy and a clear mind.

How would you counter negative perceptions within the movement of EC?

By attempting to be as accessible and accountable as possible and by trying to learn as much as possible about the recent history of our movement so I can better understand where these

negative perceptions are coming from.

What ideas do you have for ensuring the financial health of the movement in the long term?

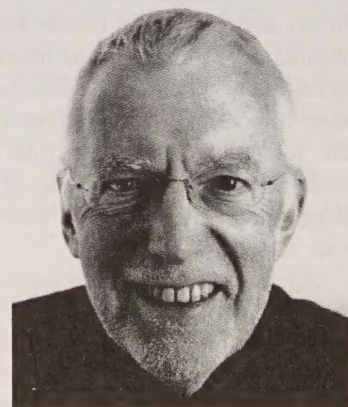
Some years ago I completed a pretty rigorous residential course on 'Financial Management for Non-financial Managers' and it was very hard work. I don't pretend to have any financial expertise and it seems premature

at this stage to start laying out my ideas on the movement's financial health. I've got a lot to learn.

What are your thoughts on more open communication between the EC and the larger movement?

Having spent my entire working life in broadcasting, unsurprisingly I'm a firm believer in the maximum degree practicable of openness, accountability and accessibility. Good and effective communication, internally and externally, is absolutely vital to the efficiency and well-being of any movement.

Describe yourself in one word: Learning



Selma marches changed the

On 7 March 1965, known as America's 'Bloody Sunday', 600 protesters tried to march from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery – the state capitol – seeking voting rights. But they were attacked by Alabama State Troopers on the Edmund Pettis Bridge. Using nightsticks, whips and teargas, they brutally forced the marchers to turn back. The Rev James Reeb, a UU minister responded to Dr Martin Luther King's call for clergy to come to Selma and was beaten to death by racists. In part two of an excerpt from his book Mark Morrison-Reed takes up the Selma story, an event which transformed the Unitarian Universalist movement.



Participants, some carrying American flags, marching in the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in 1965. Photo by Peter Pettus, held in the US Library of Congress.

Two days after the Rev James Reeb's funeral, word spread that a federal judge would permit the 50-mile march from Selma to Montgomery and ordered that it be protected by both the state and federal governments. It would take place on Sunday. The judge's ruling stipulated that as many as wished could walk on the first and last days of the march, when they would be on a four-lane highway; but on the middle days, when they would be on the two-lane Route 80, the march would be limited to 300.

In Selma and Montgomery, and across the country, people began to prepare. Jane Boyajian, the director of religious education at the UU congregation in Fairfax, Virginia, had been attending local Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) meetings. The Rev Walter Fauntroy approached her to say that Dr Martin Luther King and the SCLC leadership wanted her to organise the national mobilisation. She was to get as many people as possible, representing as many organisations as possible, to Montgomery, where they would welcome the Selma marchers on the final day and then march together with them to the capitol building. Fearing what might happen, King and the SCLC did not want people flocking down in private cars.

Organisers scrambled to assemble the necessities for a five-day march of 300 people. They needed generators for the campsites, ground tarps, air mattresses, blankets, food, and water. The Rev Eugene Pickett put out the call for members of the United Liberal Congregation in Atlanta (a UU congregation) to go if they could, or to send blankets if they couldn't. The church telephone tree sprung into action, and in a single Sunday church members supplied 250 blankets.

On Sunday afternoon, March 21, the march to Montgomery set out, led by Martin and Coretta King, Ralph and Juanita Abernathy, Ralph Bunche, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, Dick Gregory, and other notables. Behind them came 3,200 more. Overhead a single-engine Piper Cub dropped KKK leaflets.

The Rev Richard Leonard volunteered to represent Unitarian Universalism among the 300. But the organisers responded that they already had a UU—James Bell, an African-American

young adult who was a member of the Germantown Unitarian Church in Philadelphia. Still Leonard resolved to march. Steve Graves, a Meadville Lombard student, was no less determined. He steadily moved toward the front of the march where, to his surprise, he was "designated a 'line marshal' to help keep an orderly line of marchers." Later, when he was replaced by an official marshal, Graves kept right on marching with the 300, as did Leonard. So it came to pass that the two UUs who marched the entire distance were uninvited guests.

In Birmingham the UU congregation prepared for a second onslaught, larger than the first. Coming to participate in the final day of the march were two buses from Rochester, New York, carrying 150, and a plane Dana Greeley had chartered from Boston carrying 75. An anonymous member of the UU church in Bloomington, Indiana, put up the money to charter a DC3. All needed to be fed, given home hospitality, and returned to the church by 5am to be put on five buses and driven a hundred miles to Montgomery.

On the final day, among the 30,000 who marched were about 500 UU lay people and about 250 UU ministers. The ministers who went to Selma represented a quarter to a third of all UU ministers in full fellowship. Add to that the dozens who spent time with the Mississippi Summer Project, the Delta Ministry Project, and other efforts in the South afterward; those who led their communities' response; and the dozen ministers who participated in the UU presence in Selma through the summer of 1965. It isn't a stretch to estimate that half of the 710 UU ministers in full fellowship were actively engaged in this struggle. For many, the experience changed their lives. And it brought to the UUA a sea change in attitudes.

The march to Montgomery was a milestone, but it was not an end to the work or the losses. Change was imminent, but it would be expensive – and the next payment came due that evening. Viola Liuzzo, a part-time student at Wayne State

Alabama, but did the activism last?

University and wife and mother of five, had driven from Detroit to join the march, coming alone and despite her family's protest. On her arrival in Selma, she had been assigned to staff the welcoming table, greeting new arrivals. After the march, she ferried marchers back from Montgomery to Selma, along Route 80. Earlier that day she had a sense of foreboding, but had shrugged it off and gone about her business. She was heading back to Montgomery to do another shuttle run when a car pulled up beside hers and a gunman shot her in the head, killing her instantly.

ABC News had interrupted the Sunday, March 7, 1965 broadcast of Judgment at Nuremberg, a drama about the war-crime trials in Nazi Germany, to cut to footage of the vicious attack by Alabama state troopers and local vigilantes on 600 black citizens of Selma, Alabama. The connection couldn't be missed. Ethel Gorman, the president of the Unitarian Church of Birmingham, wrote that on Tuesday night, "before we got down to business, we expressed our horror at the scenes in Selma which we had seen on TV. We felt shame for our state as well as pity for the victims; and fear because law enforcement officers acted like Nazi Storm Troopers." In March 1965 the 20th anniversary of the end of the Second World War was at hand. The trauma of the war years, having touched nearly every adult, was easily evoked. Most remembered the sacrifices made, and many were aware of the consequences of inaction in the face of tyranny. Only in this context does what happened in Selma make sense.

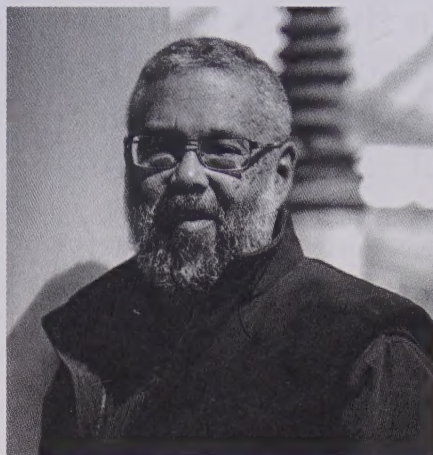
The idealism of participants suggests a 20th-century crusade: a collective struggle against injustice. Telling her husband why she had to go, Viola Liuzzo said, "It's everybody's fight. There are just too many people just standing around talking." Reeb used similar words: "It's the kind of fight I believe in. I want to be part of it." Given the moral fury that fuelled them, the metaphors of fighting and weapons came naturally. To borrow William James's phrase, Selma was "the moral equivalent of war." The fight in Selma built upon what James claimed is an innate human martial nature which cultivates the "surrender of private interest," promotes "obedience to command," and encourages "strenuous honour." The civil rights movement relied on all of these. And, as UU theologian the Rev Dr William R Jones pointed out, "The alleged rift among civil rights leaders is not a conflict over the desirability or necessity of force but a difference of opinion as regards what types of force are legitimate and effective expressions of non-violent coercion." Activists took aggressive action, but with morality as a shield, sacrifice as a weapon, and camaraderie bolstering their morale. Selma was that generation's war.

In and of themselves, noble aspirations and heroic deeds cannot undo systematically embedded patterns. After Selma, UUs preached more sermons about human rights, sang more freedom songs on Sunday mornings, and devoted more Sunday School classes to the situation of African Americans. But they sang the songs and preached the messages, by and large, in lily-white settings – in the suburbs. Without a doubt, UUs participated in more protest marches and community action. But how much attention would the cause receive in the years ahead when issues that affected Euro-American UUs directly – such as the war in Vietnam and Women's Liberation – became urgent? For how long would the cause of African Americans

– people who were not their peers nor part of their lives – remain paramount? What would summon UU attention when African-American songs and stories appeared in neither the 1964 hymnal nor Sunday school curricula and African Americans represented perhaps 1 percent of the UU population and had no voice on UU governing bodies? Unitarian Universalism in practice, structure, and complexion remained out of sync with its values.

Integration triumphed in Selma in a way that transcended the word's customary – and spurious – meaning. Genuine integration happens when parts form a new whole; it is a melding rather than the subjugation of one by another. Some UUs achieved that melding during March 1965, when their values and practices meshed, when black and white stood together at the Selma Wall, sharing in struggle and song, discomfort and celebration – needing one another. For this group of UUs, Selma was memorable because there they experienced what it felt like to be whole, rather than experiencing the different aspects of the self as at odds with one another. The barriers of race and class, head and heart, were breached. Selma was about being in authentic relationship to one's values, promises, and hopes, and honouring them by committing one's life even unto death. In giving their selves over to that time and its demands, to their conscience and sense of honour, to their faith and what it stood for, to the future and what they all hoped for, they found redemption. Together, in Selma, they found that their lives had purpose. And many, perhaps for the first time, felt whole. This was the "Spirit of Selma"; in the midst of turmoil, their values and their lives became congruent.

This article appeared in the winter 2014 issue of UU World. It is adapted with permission from 'The Selma Awakening: How the Civil Rights Movement Tested and Changed Unitarian Universalism' by Mark D Morrison-Reed (Skinner House Books, 2014). For more information see: www.uua-bookstore.org/The-Selma-Awakening-P17456.aspx The Rev Dr Mark D Morrison-Reed is a member of the faculty of Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago.



Mark D Morrison-Reed

MARK D. MORRISON-REED

The Selma Awakening



How the Civil Rights Movement Tested and Changed Unitarian Universalism

Provide ministry that enables ministry

In the fifth in a series of columns articulating a Unitarian vision **John Clifford** writes of his view of religious leadership.

My personal reflections on this might usefully start with a quote from 'Sing Your Faith' 181:

*Wake, now, my vision of ministry clear;
brighten my pathway with radiance here;
mingle my calling with all who would share;
work toward a planet transformed by our care.*

My starting point for ministry is the congregation, its ministry to the world and its covenant of membership. The Covenant and the ministry are intimately linked but it might help to look briefly at each of these:

I believe it is the task of the congregation to do its ministry and the task of a minister to help it do this, not to do it for the congregation. As a Minister leads a congregation in its ministry to the world s/he acts as a spiritual leader of the congregation in many ways: acting as repository and explainer of the Heritage; being an example of integrity in action; modelling right relationship; teaching; inspiring & motivating; exploring ethical and social issues with members; enabling; leading the kind of worship that fosters individual growth and a compassionate community that can provide a model for larger society.

The covenant of membership is the expression of right relationship between members in their explorations and the care they exhibit to each other. This is too often implicit rather than explicit and its absence is the source of many splits within congregations. The basis of covenant in a liberal religious community centres on individuals in search, not on answers, but valuing nevertheless the variety of personal developing answers that are shared; valuing personal growth in sensitivity; in skill; in compassion. A minister fosters and enables this quality of relationship in a congregation through being alert to suffering, through teaching, inspiring, leading, through Presence and through worship that deepens individual and congregation commitment to bringing compassion and justice to each other and to those in the larger society who suffer.

The ministry of the congregation to the world will take different forms depending on the composition and situation of the congregation as well as the interests and skills of the leader. The core activity of nurturing, teaching, and living our values *needs* a community to support individuals as they seek to make their lives meaningful, and meaningful is not just an intellectual exercise but is intuitive, spiritual, and practical. The unique thread of public worship brings things together but is not intended to stand alone and apart from action. As most of our congregations are urban and elderly, and as British society is more secular than formerly, the ministry to the world will often be less theological proclamation and confrontation than in our founding years of the early 19th century. As our largely secular society is much more pluralist in faith and culture than formerly, our ministry will entail issues fostering and nourishing social justice, protection of minorities, working for community harmony, and providing space for reflection and

refreshment. There are so many injustices in today's world that only a few can be tackled effectively; this can be discouraging but it also implies a wide range of choice of what issues to tackle and which bodies to collaborate with. The dynamics within congregations should process moral sensitivity among members in ways that lead to specific commitments to action based on their skills and interests.

Some typical issues would be: promoting interfaith understanding (contact programmes, public witness and even protection, joint activities, tracking religious education programmes); attempting to alleviate the extremes of poverty in our communities (support for food banks, night shelters, micro-loan schemes); educating members and the public about changes that are needed to avoid disasters (global warming, personal health, community health); raising funds for local, national, and international relief work (Red Cross, Oxfam, Guide Dogs); providing safe communities for people to come together (pensioners' clubs, drivers for events and hospital visits, community education on local fraud); maintaining civil liberty watches (supporting Amnesty International, Liberty, attending Local Authority meetings); etc, etc. No individual and no congregation can tackle every issue but these and others are there to be tackled as expressions of ministry to a suffering world.

Historically Unitarians worked more as individuals in social justice than as communities, but the modern world illustrates the importance of collaborative efforts; individuals are generally successful to the extent that they can harness the energies and skills of others.

Training our leaders to exercise leadership in this ministry requires both practical skill development (conflict resolution, public speaking, effective committee dynamics, general group dynamics, working with electronic tools) and background information (history of the major religious groups encountered in Britain, sociology of religion, legal requirements of charities) as well as personal insight tools (meditation, research, time management). Perhaps the greatest priorities for our ministers should include the ability to listen, a basic sense of fairness, an understanding of process, appreciation of historical perspective, and how our individual personalities affect our perceptions. This will, in my opinion, involve a sense of collegiate responsibility larger than the congregation s/he serves and which enables and fosters the congregation's larger identity.

Today's world is radically different to the world I trained in. Tomorrow's world will be radically different to today's world. A minister's work will change/develop and a minister's training must enable maximum flexibility in approach and constant learning through life.

Almost everything about my sense of ministry also applies to those who exercise congregational leadership on a non-professional basis, but the time available and the entry-level skills will vary more widely. This can be good, as closed circles don't grow as well or as fast as open ones, but the commitment level required may be more than can be managed. Congregations that have 'lay' leadership may therefore have to adjust their ministry to utilise the strengths of the situation while compensating for the lack of training, skills, and commitment.

The Rev John Clifford is a retired Unitarian minister.

The Magna Carta and Unitarianism

By Ingrid van Dooren

The Magna Carta, signed on 15 June 1215, was a peace treaty between King John and a group of barons who were rebelling against him because he had requested disproportionate taxes from them to pay for his wars. The barons forced King John to give concessions and recognise their rights, in this way reducing the absolute power of the King.

The Magna Carta was not meant as a lasting declaration of rights for all citizens, but in later years the document was reaffirmed so often that it became part of the law of the country and was copied onto the first ever statute roll. The Magna Carta can be regarded as an important milestone in history, as the basis of the English constitution and as the forerunner of human and civil rights provisions today, both nationally and internationally.

Two important provisions, containing the rights to liberty, justice and fair trial, still have force of law today. Nobody may be deprived of their liberty without the prior judgement of their case by an impartial and independent judge. And everybody should have access to justice and recognition of their rights. We can also find these rights in modern human rights treaties.

The underlying principle of the Magna Carta is still very much alive today: government authorities do not have absolute power; they have to recognise certain rights and liberties of the population so that there is no need to resort to rebellion. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the United Nations in 1948, is based on this principle.

One of these rights is the right to freedom of conscience and religion. In fact, this right has a vague reference in the first principle of the Magna Carta, which states:



King John signing Magna Carta on June 15, 1215, at Runnymede; coloured wood engraving, 19th century. By unknown, held by The Granger Collection, New York, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

“John, by the grace of God King of England

First that we have granted to God, and by this present charter have confirmed for us and our heirs in perpetuity, that the English Church shall be free, and shall have its rights undiminished, and its liberties unimpaired ...”

Although this does not say anything about an individual right to freedom of religion it does make it clear that the king should not interfere with the right of religious institutions to manage their own affairs.

The right to freedom of religion is, along with other human and civil rights, of great importance to Unitarian Churches, as they are based on the principle that it is a matter of free choice for each individual human being what faith, if any, to adhere to. In this way the Magna Carta, as a root document for these rights, is still relevant today for Unitarian Churches and other faith groups.

The protection of human and civil rights is in everybody's interest. It is the only way in which a peaceful and humane society is possible.

This year it is 800 years since the Magna Carta was signed. To celebrate this anniversary a conference and workshops will be held at the Medway Campus of the University of Greenwich during the week of the 15-19 June. The Magna Carta will be considered from various different perspectives, including the religious one. Anyone interested in participating in any of the activities or as a delegate can contact mivandooren@hotmail.com or visit www.magnacarta800medway.org for more information.

Dr Ingrid van Dooren is a Human Rights researcher and a member of Chatham Unitarian Church.

Motions update: Prison books rule overturned

(Continued from page 4)

have been more carefully thought through. I continue to keep in touch with the Penal Affairs Panel on this and other issues.

The Resolution supporting the Red Cross in its work in The Philippines and in Syria through the Clara Barton Disasters Emergency Appeal empowers the Executive Committee to issue further appeals in response to a major international disaster. The amendment to the GA Constitution for a dissolution clause has been discussed with the Charity Commission. The Resolution ending the convention of alternating between Ministerial and Lay nominees for the position of Vice-President has been incorporated into EC processes.

The emergency Motion on Climate Change was, of course, referred back to the proposers for more consultation before be-

ing brought back to the General Assembly. It is understood that a pack for discussion by congregations and other bodies will be produced for this year's Annual Meeting to enable a year of consultation before a Motion is presented in 2016.

Resolutions set out a position and sometimes their impact is not felt for many years when the issue finally reaches the public agenda. The Resolution on assisted dying for example remains useful as Parliament has begun to engage seriously with the issue. Congregations will pick and choose what is of interest to them. I certainly value the clarity they give on specific issues.

Derek McAuley is Chief Officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.

Letters to the Editor

A minister: a prophet, a priest and a person

To the Editor:

The 17 January issue of *The Inquirer* has several articles that are good for a theological discussion. I especially enjoyed Stephen Lingwood's essay on two roles of ministry.

I look forward to hearing Stephen when he joins Sheena Gabriel in speaking at the induction of Rev. Dr. Maria Curtis as new minister to Horsham Unitarians (2pm, Saturday, 7 March, Unitarian Church, Worthing Rd, Horsham, West Sussex).

How would you state the role of ministry?

Once, when I was asked to give "the Charge" to a new minister, I took my start from Bergson's *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. A Unitarian Universalist Minister is called to be a prophet and a priest. To these two I added, "be a person."

Be a Prophet, "Do Justice." Like ML King, Jr. Be a priest, "love mercy". Practice the kindness, forgiveness, and gratitude that inspire a congregation. Be a person. Don't just be a professional. Be a friend. And remember, "The Only way to have a friend is to be one."

The Rev Richard Boeke
Horsham

A minister helps people to do it themselves

To the Editor:

Stephen Lingwood writes (*Inquirer*, 17 January): 'If we have "ministers", then we need to be able to say why we have them.' On the basis of well over 60 years as a minister, let me offer one suggestion.

The model I have used was described by a now-forgotten minister, Francis Terry, in an article published back in 1948 in *Faith and Freedom*. He called it *The Maieutic Personality*, using Socrates as his prime example but including also the ministry as practised by the Buddha, Confucius and Jesus. Socrates, he said, disclaimed wisdom and did not purport to teach anything, serving rather as a 'midwife to people's souls'. 'His hearers, when they try to describe him, find that their own memories are inextricably

entangled with the ideas which they have themselves produced under his influence.'

The greatest compliment I ever received on my own attempt to use such a model came when a colleague said that my ministry reminded him of the passage in the Tao-te-Ching which says that when the good leader has accomplished his work, the people all say: 'We did it ourselves.'

The Rev Phillip Hewett
Vancouver, Canada

Exhumed bodies are handled with great care

To the Editor:

Many thanks to those who have expressed an interest in the recent exhumations at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, which is in preparation for a new tram line being built in the city centre. The chapel's history is woven with many strands of near-annihilation: attempts by the council to purchase the property, bombing, and the gradual usurpation of graveyard space. When the road was expanded, it was on condition that the bodies were not to be moved.

When the most recent chapel was built, only those graves that were affected were moved to Southern Cemetery; now that the tram line will invariably affect more sites, more people will make their way to there. Great care has been taken to research the people, and ensure their remains are treated with dignity. A more detailed account will be written once the exhumation is completed.

The Rev Cody Coyne
Cross Street Chapel, Manchester
Paul is misrepresented by orthodox and liberal

To the Editor:

I'm afraid David Heap is being rather unfair to Paul (*Inquirer*, 17 January). Firstly, Paul most certainly does *not* make the 'deity of Jesus' a 'foundation stone' of the church's theology. Nowhere does Paul say that Jesus was God. Secondly, Paul does not – as David says – 'insist on the intrinsic inferiority of women.' On the contrary in the authentic text (as opposed to interpolation and false attribution) he teaches and reflects the radical equality

The INQUIRER

The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7838 17 January 2015

The beginning of the year of the New Year is a time of hope and renewal. It is a time when we look back on the past and forward to the future. It is a time when we reflect on the things we have done and the things we have yet to do. It is a time when we seek to make the world a better place for all of us.

THE TALE OF A CHRISTIAN ATHEIST

of women and men within the church community. This he calls the 'Body of Christ', which also explains Paul's understanding of the resurrection. That is to say, it is the human community in which the Spirit once manifested in Jesus rises again and takes a new physical form.

David also implies some dark conspiracy which 'expunged' and 'destroyed' texts indicating that Jesus survived the crucifixion. In fact there was a concerted effort by the newly-'orthodox' church to suppress or sideline texts offering an alternate version of Christianity, but the effort failed.

Many such texts have survived and can be read today. I don't think any of them support the notion which David implies. I'm afraid it is Paul's misfortune to be misunderstood and misrepresented by both the 'orthodox' and the 'liberal'.

The Rev Cliff Reed
Ipswich

Inquirer letters

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com. Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF.

Responses to 'A faith that matters'

As part of a series of columns on a Unitarian vision for the future, **Bill Darlison** wrote a challenging piece, calling Unitarianism a 'fair-weather religion which speaks to the optimistic and the comparatively prosperous'. These are two responses.

By John C Hall

Bill Darlison, former Unitarian General Assembly president and retired Unitarian minister, writes very challengingly for us, in the 3 January edition of *The Inquirer* magazine. He asks: 'How we can be a faith that matters?' and he goes on to address serious Unitarian shortcomings, from his point of view. Quoting from a *Guardian* article: 'Unitarianism is tediously untragic', Bill takes this to mean that ours is, "... a fair-weather religion which speaks to the optimistic and the comparatively prosperous but which has little or nothing to say about the anxiety and despair which afflict us all, not because we are poor or disadvantaged, but *just because we are human*." So that is concerning enough; but then he presses on: "To the questions, 'Who am I?', 'Why am I here?', 'Where am I going?', 'What's the ultimate point of it all?' we can offer no answers beyond the dreary banalities distilled from Neo-Darwinism, that we are nothing special, that we got here by accident... and that there's no ultimate point." And if this, from

Bill Darlison, isn't questioning current Unitarianism almost to the point of despair, he continues, after another pummelling paragraph: "Our own ethical society – masquerading-as-religion satisfies few human desires." And I would say that *that* was the particular sentence that sparked off this personal response.

Perhaps the great question for Unitarians should be: what, truly, *are* we? Is there, largely owing to our pulling away from traditional Christianity, combined with a rationalist intellectuality, something of the *loosely* religious about us? Or, in the case of some Unitarians, not even tenuously religious? Yes, but then we are, as Unitarians, altogether concerned about what can be termed *spiritual* matters. And I think that we Unitarians *do* put quite as much emphasis on the 'interior life' as we put on our 'political efforts'. Certainly my personal view is that we *are* a brotherhood community that matters.

Indeed, in a climate of religious extremism, surely we matter very much! And don't we need to accept that we are *different*? For instance, there is no one Unitarian faith. So, personally I do feel that we need to believe in ourselves as Unitarians; and countering Bill Darlison's *The Inquirer* piece somewhat, I'd say that we need to keep faith with our sensibly independent Unitarianism, while seeking to establish whether we can term ourselves Christian or Post-Christian.

As a comparative 'new boy', I have to acknowledge that we could be viewed as taking up an indeterminate position where religion is concerned. And whereas Bill Darlison wishes that we were more overtly religious within Unitarianism, some of us might see that as feeling like a retreat rather than an enlightenment? So what do *you* think?

John C Hall is a member at Evesham.

We are wrong to leave Christianity behind

By Jim Corrigan

The article by Bill Darlison on whether we can be 'a faith that matters' was most stimulating (*Inquirer*, 3 January). His warnings that we need to re-learn the importance of prayer and spiritual practice, and the value of poetic and metaphorical understandings, seem timely.

I was particularly interested in his statement that 'unacknowledged dogmas' pervade our denominational thinking – he refers to a sterile 'rationalism'.

It seems to me perhaps the most pervasive 'orthodoxy' of our denomination today is that we – as a denomination – have no shared theology, only shared values. And this is usually presented as a neutral or 'common sense' position, which requires no theological or philosophic justification.

Yet surely to assert that we are 'non-theological' or that we have 'no common theology' is itself a deeply theological statement – just as maintaining one is 'non-political' is a deeply political stance (usually unacknowledged). Our position may well have developed from our radical protestant roots, and it may chime with some contemporary popular ideas, but surely in its contemporary form it should be introduced as a starting point for theological reflection rather than as the conclusion?

In terms of practical theology, little support for such a belief is likely to be found among faith practitioners of the

different world religions. Obviously most creedal Christians would reject it, but so too would Sufi mystics (who say *if you want to find water, dig one deep hole rather than 10 shallow ones*), to the spiritual teachers of Buddhism and Hinduism, who emphasise the need to *choose a path* if one is to advance spiritually, and for that path to have authentic cultural resonance for the devotee. Liberal Jews believe it essential to remain rooted in the Jewish Bible, even as they advance very liberal positions on contemporary issues.

Could the (mainly) unacknowledged point of maintaining we have no 'shared theology' be that it allows us 'leave behind' Christianity, the only theological tradition we are heir to, and thus to leave behind the difficult task of renewing it in our assertively multi-faith world (a task we may be particularly well-qualified for)?

The Rev Jim Corrigan is minister with Lancashire Collaborative Ministry.

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Blooming new developments at Hucklow

By Julie Dadson

In an over-grown corner of the car park, behind Barleycrofts Cottages, an embryonic new enterprise is taking shape at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow.

Julie Dadson came on board as part-time gardener last year to continue developing the flower borders to provide a year-round display for guests to enjoy. Centre Manager, Stella Burney thought that a poly-tunnel would help to provide a good source of home-grown plants and began a fund-raising plan to pay for this.

Kind-hearted knitter, and great friend of the centre, Kath Ryder began to knit copious numbers of 'Ted', the adorable hand puppet to raise money for the tunnel. He now bears the name 'Tunnel Ted' and thanks to generous guests, he has single-handedly funded the new tunnel, now in place.

As Julie hoes and prunes her way around the grounds, she now takes cuttings, splits clumps of plants and pots up wastrels to sell 'a little piece of Hucklow' to guests who would like to take a memory home.

Stella's innovation continued and a further piece of wasteland was cleared and fenced providing a sales area for the Plant Nursery project. Stella is also looking into the idea of keeping bees at the centre and John Crosskey, who works at Essex Hall (a keen beekeeper), is kindly providing advice for the viability of this.

The budget for garden maintenance is a very small one. Therefore, this project needs to fund itself and is being developed with innovation, imagination and the good-hearted 'friends of Hucklow'. If readers of this article need to declutter their gardens this spring, the centre will gladly take your unwanted plants, pots, tools, paving slabs or indeed ... your greenhouse!

A hope for the future is that 'Ted's Plant Nursery' will provide an added attraction for the guests and bring some extra revenue to the centre.

The gardens at the Nightingale Centre have a long history. There is no budget for new plants, but over the years many lovely specimens have been donated by kind gardening friends of Hucklow. The early spring snowdrops give way to bulbs and herbaceous perennials which include native plants such as the Peak District 'Jacobs Ladder'. Then, of course, there are the roses, which flower until the first frosts and shrubs and trees: maples, rowans and the two magnificent Corsican Cypress which stand sentinel in the front garden, framing the building.



'Ted's Tunnel' at the Nightingale Centre. Photo by Julie Dadson



View of the front flower garden at the Nightingale Centre. Photo by Julie Dadson

Julie is qualified in Horticulture and Landscape design and management, with a history of designing courses for farmers and land-owners on pond-creation, woodland management and wild-flower meadow creation. She also won an innovation award in Warrington for her project to teach gardening and vegetable growing to house-holders, in a deprived area of the town. It seemed ideal then, to introduce a range of fun and informative gardening and landscape courses at Hucklow this spring and summer as listed below:

22-24 May (Weekend)

A fun-packed and hands-on early spring course making your own hanging basket to take home. Topics covered include raised bed construction and simple vegetable growing. Weekend includes a visit to Riverside herbs and Chatsworth gardens.

27-29 May (Mid-week)

The frosts are over (we hope) and we will take a look at spring planting in the borders. We will learn the principles of simple garden design and how to make the best compost (and what to do with it). Includes a visit to Sheffield Botanical Gardens.

4-6 September (Weekend)

September is a great month to propagate, divide and split your plants, making hundreds of new plants for free to swap with friends – come and learn how. Also, what is a weed and what is a wildflower? What is a bad (pernicious) weed and which weeds can we eat? A private tour of the beautiful gardens of Great Hucklow is included.

18-20 September (Weekend)

As we prepare the garden for winter – what do we need to think about? We will have our own chilli and squash festival – how to best grow these? How to cook with them and what does that taste like? Also decorative craft with chillies and gourds. What have you grown? Bring and show. Includes a visit to Longshaw Kitchen Garden.

So, when you visit Hucklow this year – make sure that there is a little space in the car for the plants that you will buy. Better still, come and join us for one of the great gardening weekends, share your expertise and maybe learn a little something new.

The Nightingale Centre Open Day will be held on 6 June. Come and see the gardens then and don't forget to visit Ted's Tunnel!

For further information call Stella on 01298 871218, email her on info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk Or look up the website: www.thenightingalecentre.org.uk/whats_on.php